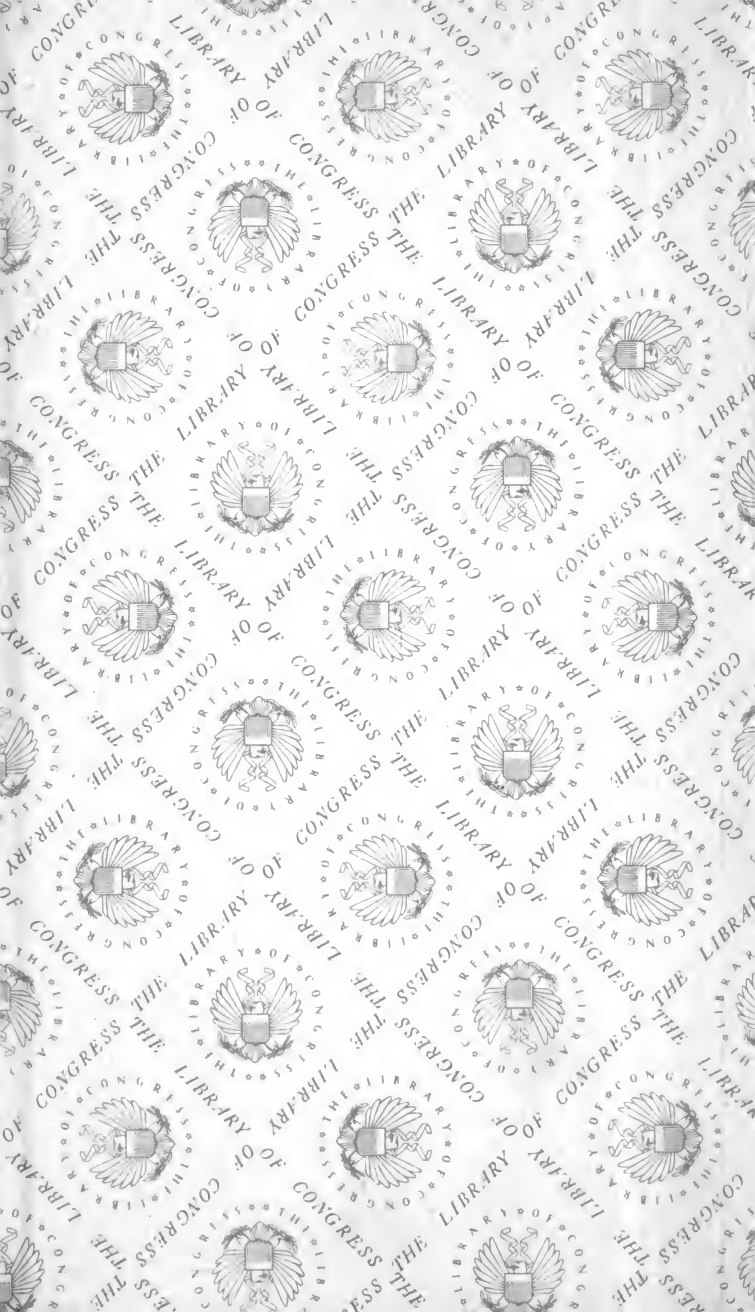


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1837







A D V E N T,

A MYSTERY.

BY

ARTHUR CLEVELAND COX. ^e



NEW-YORK:

JOHN S. TAYLOR.

1837.

PS 1449
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TO MY FATHER.

FATHER, as he of old who reap'd the field,
The first young sheaves to Him did dedicate

Whose bounty gave whate'er the glebe did
yield,

Whose smile the pleasant harvest might
create —

So I to thee these numbers consecrate,
Thou who didst lead to Silo's pearly spring;
And if of hours well saved from revels
late

And youthful riot, I these fruits do bring,
Accept my early vow, nor frown on what
I sing.



P R E F A C E .

THE poem thus submitted with diffidence to the public, was commenced without any idea that it would ever assume its present form, or indeed that it would at all extend beyond the limits of a proper pastoral eclogue. It was originally designed for the ear of a few friends alone, and as part of an entertainment for a Christmas Eve ; and this plan has been exceeded without any intention of making a book, only because the subject itself interested me, and I had the leisure to pursue it.

Since its completion I have been invited, by circumstances equally favourable and unforeseen, to lay it before the public ; and in yielding to such inducements I have only to regret — what may not prove so disadvantageous in the issue — that my first ap-

pearance as a candidate for popular approbation, should be in a style of poetry but little adapted to popular demand. New poetry is in itself but little desirable or desired. And yet this is the case, not so much because as students of old English lore we justly feel that the "old is better," as because these latter days have already so largely contributed to the stock that was rich before. We feel as if there should now be an end of verse-making. Poetry is itself unpalatable to our satiety; and since the public taste has been so surfeited with the racy romance of the later British writers, there is in particular but little relish for the austerer forms of beauty, in which the muse was accustomed to present her moral before these dazzling days. Yet if, as I am led to believe, there still be those who can stoop from highest fancy, and leave the storms of passion, to tread the quiet walks

where Poesy was wont to lead her votaries of old, I trust that my humble attempt to plant a new pleasure in their pathway, will not fail to find those who will at least appreciate the endeavour, whatever may be their opinion as to the advantage gained by it to the scenes that their spirit loves.

I suppose I may be pardoned a few words with regard to the work itself. Owing to the circumstances of its composition, and the straitness of my original design, the poem, though written in a dramatic form, can scarcely be designated by any one of the titles which are usually applied to works of that description. There are parts of it which partake much of the character of the idyl, others which belong more to the oratorio than to the regular drama, and others again which are more conformed to the manner of the old masques of Ben Jonson's time. Yet on the whole,

as the subject is one so intimately connected with the Scripture narrative, I trust I have not erred in giving it the old monkish title of *a mystery* — a kind of play which, although of little repute in its original form, has of late assumed a dignity to which I am conscious nothing may be added by my own contribution, however well intended.

I am well aware that a poem written in dialogue, and divided into scenes, generally raises the expectation of an intricate plot, and that if such be the anticipation with which this may be read, I shall entirely fail to give that satisfaction which I certainly desire to afford. I would therefore embrace the opportunity of confessing beforehand, that — although I hope there will be found in it *a beginning, a middle, and an end*, of its own kind — there is nothing of a catastrophe properly so called, nor is the poem in any way calculated for stage effect,

or even for ideal representation. As it professes to employ the *dramatis personæ* only to avoid the historical form, I trust it will be deemed sufficient, if the parts be found naturally linked together, and *the unities* in no way very grossly violated.

In conclusion, it may not be improper to remark, as some palliation of the errors and imperfections that may be discoverable by the critic not only, but also by the general reader, that the work was ready for the press before the author had completed his nineteenth year, and has not received the benefit of older or more experienced supervisal. And though youth as an apology, for what itself should have prevented from coming into cognizance, is like the plea of him who adduces his inebriety as an excuse for his crime, I cannot resist the feeling which nature's self has given me, that very possibly that

which is no *plea*, may yet be influential in my favour, with hearts that, like my own, are human.

Auburn, September, 1837.

A D V E N T.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

MEN.

ZACHARIAS.

OMAR, chief of the Wise Men.

REUEL, a Shepherd.

WOMEN.

ELIZABETH.

SERAH, a Shepherdess.

OTHERS.

ITHIEL, a superior angel.

ADIEL, an attendant Spirit.

HECATE.

Somnus, a Demon supposed to cause unnatural slumbers; *Shepherds*; *The Wise Men*; *Shepherdesses*; *Choruses*, etc.

A D V E N T.

SCENE, *a grove near Bethlehem. Time, Sunset.*

Serah enters with another Shepherdess.

SERAH.

SEE yonder in what glory sinks the sun !
The wanton clouds that overhang the hills
Seem airy shapes, that lighted by his smile
Bend o'er his path to watch him as he goes.

SHEPHERDESS.

Like a young bridegroom to his night's repose,
So steals he to the purpled ocean's breast,
While the chaste eve o'ercurtaineth his rest
And Hesper smiling lights his lamp of love.

SERAH.

Meanwhile, how glows the pathway he hath left !
Those tints all varied as the arching bow

Shine but like it — sure pledge of sunny days,
And golden omen of a dawn as bright.

SHEPHERDESS.

But first the omen of an eve as fair !
Say, gentle Serah, shall we hie at once
To Reuel's lawn, and there with dances light
In past'ral sports pass off the dewy hours ? —
Or shall we rather wait till moonlight comes,
And then with singing and thy warbling lute
Go serenade the stars ?

SERAH.

To Reuel's lawn
Thou know'st I'd rather go. But oh, I've thought !
This breezy hour puts music in my soul,
And frolic in my limbs — come, come with me ;
I'll tell thee what I think on as we walk.

SHEPHERDESS.

Gladly I'll hear, there's music in thy talk ;
And if thou art so sportive as thou say'st
I read it well — for thou would'st dance to-night !

[Exeunt, and Adiel appears from another direction.]

ADIEL.

How soft the landscape, and how balm the breeze !
So winter in this climate is disarm'd
Of his chill terrors, and advances bland
As the ripe autumn of far northward isles.
Not thus in distant Thulé does he come,
Or in the island where the druid priest
Binds his rude altar with the mistletoe ;
For there loud tempests trumpet his approach,
And winds shrill wailing mourn his tyrant reign.
But here — all mild, all gentle is his rule !
Thrice happy land, where e'en so stern a king
Bears but an olive rod — his temples shorn
Of his old frosty locks — with smiling brow,
And girt with Pleasures for his councillors.
Here the knit months seem children of a birth,
Offspring of Autumn and the laughing Spring :
Here Harvesting and Seed-time join their hands,
The Day still smileth on the husbandman,
And Darkness blasts not with unwholesome dews.
Come then soft Twilight, with thy shadows come,
And with thy loneliness and stillness too.
I wait thy charmed hour ; and o'er these hills,
That swell so graceful and so green around,

I long to see thy dark blue veil outspread,
And its soft broidery of the heavenly hue
Gemm'd with new lustres, deep'ning still in shade
Till the starr'd Eve succeeds. Sink low proud
Sun,

And haste thee Evening! Ere thine earliest star
Shows glimm'ring through the golden-tinted west,
Here shall bright Ithiel meet me, earthward borne
On wings whose glitter might outvie the dawn,
Or shame yon ling'ring orb. He comes to bring
New mandates from above, and to require
The render'd story of my deeds below.

And I unblushing, save with modest joy,
May cheerful meet him! Hither was I sent
With olive wand to charm the world to rest;
To lull the raging people, and to calm
The heavings of the troubled nations' strife:
And long the labour — but at length 'tis done.
All ended is mine errand, and the Earth,
Deck'd like a bride to welcome her espoused,
Smiles to th' enamour'd skies, and woos her King
To stoop forgiving to her pure embrace.
He, like the pearly dew on tender herbs,
Down to these flowery hills ere long shall come;

And like the grateful showers that glad the fields,
And bid the valleys bloom in purer green,
So shall his presence bid mankind rejoice,
So shall his smile make glad the utmost lands.
And Saba's kings shall greet him with a gift,
And Tarshish and the isles shall own their Lord,
And Ethiopia lift to Heaven her hands.
So shall all Earth adore him, and e'en now
His gentle reign is in the world begun.
Hush'd is the noise of war; and morn no more
Is waked by clangours of the threat'ning trump,
But comes all ruddy, roused by virgin's lay,
By shepherd's shout upon the grassy hills,
And reckless whistle of the merry boy,
That drives to pasture or to forage free
His father's lowing kine.

[*A shepherd's flute is heard.*]

Ah well, ye swains,
That pipe your flocks from browsing to the fold,
Well, may ye thus with woodland minstrelsy
Welcome the close of gentle twilight round,
That comes no more to veil the ambuscade,
Nor yet to glow with heav'n-affronting fires
That from beleagur'd cities flout the air.

Oh times more blest than poet e'er hath sung !
More happy than the heathens' reign of gold,
And brighter far in sweet reality
Than fancy ever fram'd. So earth once more
Is worthy of the perfect hand that made !
And I, delighted with a change so fair,
Still range this lower sphere, and live on earth,
Though by high birthright native of the skies.
— But soft ! Here comes bright Ithiel at length
Winging through rosy dew's his shining way.

[*Ithiel descends.*]

All hail, superior spirit ! I await
Thy high behest, and ready will obey.

ITHIEL.

Fair spirit, hail ! we meet on earthly ground ;
Yet on so great, so glorious an eve,
And at so holy and so pure an hour,
That our celestial virtues need not fear
This low descent from converse with the skies.

ADIEL.

Aye, 'tis a low descent—yet worthier now
Of our pure natures, than 'twas e'er before

Since man's first parent from his Eden fell.
Oh hapless fall !— Yet say, bright hierarch,
(For I full long have been exiled from heaven,)
How soon our throned King himself shall bow,
As long design'd, to taste this low descent ;
To lay awhile his ardent Godhead by,
And for a season put the semblance on
Of man's unworthy and defiled flesh ;
Until—though lower than the angels made—
All things be subjected to human feet,
And the apostate's serpent-head be crush'd.

I T H I E L .

Oh joy, bright Adiel ! This night he comes
To be incarnate of a virgin pure ;
And as on cherub wings he flieth down,
Bowing the skies and yon blue canopy,
Ten thousand minstrel servitors are set
To page his burning pathway, and to hymn
The glory of descending majesty
On glitt'ring harps to heaven's outdazzled stars.
All glorious shall the princely pageant be ;
And royally shall our Messiah ride ;
For songs, and symphonies, and pæans sweet

Shall breathe his mercy—as his thunders oft
Outspeak the vengeance of his injured law.
And doubtless, Adiel, thy work is done,
And all thine errand well accomplished
For this long-promised hour.

ADIEL.

All, all is done,
And finish'd are my labours here below ;—
Oh blessed hour that thus repays my toil,
And brings his advent, scarce so nigh supposed !
Oh lift thine eyes, blest Ithiel ! see around
How these poor children of the erring pair
Have learn'd at length becomingly to live
In sweet fraternal union. Europe's sons
In courtly beauty and most worthy love,
Greet with a brother's smile the distant race
That people Elam, and that live between
Euphrates and the Tigris. They in turn
Stretch to the dark-brow'd Ethiop friendly arms,
And hail him offspring of a common sire.
So, as the prophet sung, all fearless now
The lambkin riots with the wolf, and lays

Its harmless head upon his shaggy hide.
The monarch lion, and the princely pard
Bend their submissive necks to flowery bands,
And infants lead them. E'en the venom'd asp
And irritable adder lose their stings,
And dally with the fledgeling, or entice
With uninjurious charms the parent bird
To stoop his gilded wing, and give his plumes
To the fond greeting of their forked tongues.
Old Earth looks young once more, and hopes again
The favour of her Sovereign and her Lord,
And the sweet coming of that golden reign
That reinstates her into former bliss,
The forfeit of the fall.

I THIEL.

Oh, nobly done !

And blest art thou that makest peace on earth,
And with good title named a child of God
And heritor of praise.

But see, the night
Comes on apace, with twilight deepening round
And gentle dews descending, while the Day,
Careering king ! drives swift adown the steep

Of the enamell'd west his flashing car.
Brief must I be ; once more I need thine aid,
And once again thy ministry I ask
For a more dreadful and more hard a task.

ADIEL.

Let me but hear, and willingly my feet
Shall hasten wheresoe'er thou bidd'st me go,
Impatient of delay.

ITHIEL.

Give hearing then
To what I tell thee. O'er these neighb'ring hills,
Hidden 'mid dark grown thickets, is a cave
By demons haunted and by wizards held,
And guarded by the subtleties and charms
Of vile enchanters and accursed dames
That with familiar spirits have discourse.
There too such shapes from hell's hot holds as
come
Do oft resort ;—there swarm the vampire brood
That prey on feeble man—all crimes are there ;
'Tis hell's own gathering-place and rendezvous.
And there they riot all the livelong night,

With rites obscene defiling hours of dark,
And shaming starlight with their vile employ.
All blood-stain'd is the den, for often there
The wand'rer comes, by phantoms led astray —
Oh never more to leave the horrid hall,
(Save his poor spirit, chased by them to hell,
Escape to harder doom ;—or heavenly wings
Bear his pure soul from hands that can but kill,
And after that have naught that they can do :)
Tempted he enters in, but knows not why.
There Hecat' holds her reign, and all around
The walls are garnish'd with infernal tools,
Scourges and thongs, and skulls and bony piles
And implements of magic : while for light
A blood-red glare the presence dark illumines,
And casts its fearful glow on forms accurst —
So awful, that e'en spirits pure and blest,
And souls unfallen, well might quake to see !

ADIEL.

[*In amazement.*]

And what must I do there ?

I T H I E L .

Be not dismay'd,
For Virtue and thy God shall with thee be ;
And fear not them, for they themselves will fear ;
And more will quake at that bright face of thine
Than could an angel at all hell let loose.
Hie thither then, and with commanding word
Disperse them, for they gather even now
Around their queen ; and 'tis not meet that they,
At this so hallow'd and so blest a time,
Should sport their hellish power, or harm the ones
For whom our blessed Monarch bears such love,
And stoops so low.

A D I E L .

All angel as I am,
And mail'd with virtue's holy armour on,
Scarce do I dare to venture where they haunt,
Or draw the air they breathe.

I T H I E L .

Thy surety be
In Heav'n and thy chaste soul. 'Tis said that e'en
A mortal virgin, if she pure hath lived,

Hath such ethereal armour, that no power
Or charm of demon's or enchanter's art
Can mar her maiden beauty, or despoil
The casket of her bright virginity ;
And that if such but part her lips to speak
And bid them gone, that moment they must fly.
But thou, fair Adiel, an angel form,
Child of the skies and stainless as divine,
May'st wholly rule them, and may'st drive to hell
Or hold them spell-bound in their haunt, at will.

A D I E L.

Thy words have arm'd me, Ithiel ; and no more
My tongue shall question what thy will ordains :
Gladly I go, and joy to disappoint
Their curs'd designs.

I T H I E L.

And further, if thou seest
Aught that requires thine interposing aid,
Or needs thy service, thou art free till morn
To do whate'er thou choosest, and where'er
Duty may lead thee, readily to go.

But be thou early at the humble door
Where ere the morn our Lord shall cradled be.

A D I E L .

I go, bright seraph, and thy hest obey,
And arm'd with virtue's panoply divine,
Bold will I meet, as Michael did of yore,
The bravest of the heav'n-defying throng.
Peace with thee be !

I T H I E L .

Our God be with thee too,
And fear no power less mighty than his own.

[Adiel departs.]

And now I must away as duty bids,
That all things may be order'd and prepared
For his august approach and advent near.
Soon shall I come glad legate of the skies,
To warn the shepherds of His high estate
Who condescends this night to dwell with men,
And lays his awful head to peaceful rest
In the poor crib where feeds the lab'ring ox,
Though lull'd by whisp'ring angels to his sleep,
And watch'd by flaming seraphs marshall'd near.

Scene changes. A cave garnished with magical emblems and uncouth devices. Skulls and bones scattered about, and a fire of peculiar appearance burning in the centre. Hecate discovered on an elevation. Enter a troop of fiends. As they approach Hecate sings.

HECATE.

Welcome to my dismal den,
Sons of demons ! foes of men !
Glad I see you at my call
Thronging to my hellish hall,
And in works of fiendish might
Ready to improve the night.
Tell me whence ye come, and how
Ye have spent the time till now.

CHORUS OF FIENDS.

We have sported vengeance well !
And with all the arts of hell
Have been torturing and trying
All the living, all the dying.

FIRST FIEND.

Fire has ravaged many a town —
Pain has crept 'neath many a crown —
Murder has been busy nightly,
Darkness help'd his work unsightly —
Famine, Pestilence, and Wrath,
With all evils in their path,
Have been free their terrors throwing,
While fierce Tempest has been blowing.

CHORUS.

So we've done, terrific queen,
Since your horrid hall we've seen :
Some with torment withering fast,
Some with slow consuming blast,
Some with poisons sharp and fell,
Some with arts new brought from hell ;
But each one with enmity
To mankind, and faith to thee.

HECATE.

Ye have well perform'd your part,
Practised in infernal art ;

And ye seem all true to be,
Coming thus right speedily
To await my further will,
And my mandates to fulfil.
Dread they are ! a mighty task
Now from one and all I ask : —
But ere this ye hear from me
I must test your feälty.

CHORUS.

Queen of fiends, we swear to thee
By thy name of Hecaté ;
By thy most unholy power ;
By the midnight's charmed hour ;
By our dismal bony badge
Wrested from the sarcophage ;
By the horrid and the dread ;
By hell-flames of lurid red ;
By all cursed things — that we
Will be faithful unto thee,
And obedient to fulfil
Thine infernal wish and will.

HECATE.

I your sworn allegiance take —
Swear it by the Stygian lake !

CHORUS.

By the fiery Styx we swear,
And by Cocytus' burning water ;
By the fiends that haunt the air ;
By thyself, hell's mighty daughter ;
By the stream that nine times winding
Round the dismal realm doth go,
And by all that can be binding
In the burning caves below —
That we faithful are, and never
From our feälty will sever.

HECATE.

List then, ye fiends ! the feälty ye vow
This dreaded night shall test. No sport of pow'r,
No charm, no dance, no dirge of damned souls,
No show of subtle magic — naught that gives
Delight or pleasure to such hearts as ours
Has call'd you hither now. Ye come, alas !

Your own tremendous doom to ratify,
And seal the vengeance that must blast ye soon.
Long have we been at large, and long have work'd
On man's unhappy race unnumber'd ills,
Accountable to none, and unrestrain'd
By the high hand which fashion'd us at first,
And which we spurn'd tyrannic. Far and free,
And flush'd with fiendish joy, our hosts have roam'd
O'er the scathed world, like Egypt's locust pest,
Blasting each herb, each fruit and pleasant flower,
And bearing blackness on our blighting wings.

CHORUS.

Ha, ha ! Ha, ha ! we've sported well !
Such the triumph that we tell—
Be his vengeance what it may,
Scarce his bolted wrath shall pay
For the terrors we have hurl'd
O'er his misbegotten world !

HECATE.

Ha, ha ! Ha, ha ! his red right hand
Is arm'd with flames to blast us,

And burning seraphs have command
Down to hell's gulfs to cast us :—
But ha ! we'll laugh 'midst mortal howling,
We'll light with smiles the dismal scowling,
We'll shout 'mid groans, to think how well
We've earn'd his deepest, hottest hell !
And we will joy to think we've wrought
What e'en his all-devouring fire
Can ne'er avenge, though fully fraught
With his thunderbolted ire !
Ha ! fiends — his hell is but a heaven,
Since to drive us further still
From his hated throne 'tis given

CHORUS.

—So we'd rather far be driven,
Than be servants to his will.

HECATE.

List then once more, nor thus with futile yell
Break in upon my dread discourse again !
Stifle your useless rage, nor waste the time
In empty leers, and hollow outcries raised
In puny scorning of a power ye fear.

We have no time for weak defiance now ;
Our triumph-hours are o'er ; for know, ye fiends,
At the mid watch of night our reign is done !
Our dark enchantments save not. Then will come
Troops of arm'd angels, with hot weaponry
To drive us to our doleful prison-house,
And bind us howling there.

[They start in terror.]

Nay, menace not,
Nor rise as wont to orgies strong no more :
Stir not the mystic fire ; its embers now
Are like the incense of rebellious Core,
That brought no help from hell, but anger'd heaven.
Give o'er your spells to-night ! No whispers here
Of charm or mutter'd magic, can avail
When God's own thunders are abroad without :
So tamely wait your chains.

CHORUS.

Nay, curst be he who reigns !
If yield we must —

HECATE.

Silence ! ye are but dust —

And soon like dust must trodden be beneath
The Conqueror's bruising heel. This night he
comes ;

His burning axle now is on its way ;—
And girt with armies bright, he comes a King,
Revisiting his long disturb'd domains,
And purging from the world such pests as we.
Long time we must be bound, and then perchance
Loosed for a season, but with weaken'd might,
And no more suffer'd to afflict so free,
Or to such issues, children he hath bought
With price as wondrous as to us 'tis dire.

CHORUS.

Dire ! dire indeed ! we weep, we wail !
But his fiery-flooded hail
Burns not as his triumph stings ;
Nor scathes our air-infecting wings
With a torture half so dread,
As on his own Almighty head
And on his human sons we'd throw,
Might we 'scape our hold below,
And scale the crystal barrier's height
That bars with beams of living light

Those mockers of our curs'd estate—
The fields, the climes, the homes we hate.

HECATE.

Oh doubly ruin'd, wretched fate !

CHORUS.

Where, where shall we appear
When ope the yawning caverns wide—
When falls the fury we've defied,
And we the thunders hear
That cast us from those homes at first !
Oh where, when clouds of vengeance burst,
That imaged forth Jehovah's frown—
And comes the flame-clad army down
To chain us tame though frantic there
Where gnaw the furies —

HECATE.

— And Despair
Howls through the black envenom'd air.

But cease your wail ! No more
Your loss deplore,

Nor quake with coward fear —
Despair, and hear.

CHORUS.

So ever must we yield when thou art near.

HECATE.

Then smother quick your rage. A stubborn fate
Decrees it. It must be ; and we must bend
To the fell vengeance of a power defied.
But then why idle now ? Why waste in words
The hours we might employ in mighty works,
In deeds that shall outyell our falling groans,
And like our torment smoke eternally.
Great things I purpose, which at least shall show
Our spite how deep, our hatred how sincere.
But first, a task less hideous and less hard
To Somnus I commit. Go, sleepy god,
And with oblivious Lethé sprinkle o'er
The palaces of kings, the huts of swains,
And every roof that houses breathing men
Through all this land of Jewry far and near.
Go, too, to those who watch on lone patrol
The streets of cities, and to those who keep

Their flocks beneath the starlight ; and to these
Go first, as far most like to witness that
Which by precautions such as these, we keep
From admiration of terrestrial eyes
— The festive entry of Earth's conquering king.
For though he come in clouds of glory down
And angels page his pathway to the earth,
So shall we make spectatorless the show
And pageant of his triumph, and abstract
From the outwitted God, his subjects' gaze.
But wherefore tarry ? Go thou stupid fiend —

[*Somnus departs.*]

And list ye others to my high behests,
And still more spiteful plans.

FIRST FIEND.

But hark ! what sounds !
And who is this advancing !

SECOND FIEND.

They come, they come, I saw them then —

ANOTHER.

Their flaming swords are glancing !

HECATE.

List ! nay, away ! Before our time
They drive us to the hapless clime —

*Adiel enters as they attempt to fly, and prevents
them.*

ADIEL.

Hence hateful throng ! And know the hour is near
Of your o'erwhelming doom : But answer first,
— Held spell-bound till ye tell me — whither fled
That dastard demon who at my approach
Left your dark cabin ? Answer me at once,
Else with these snaky thongs I scourge you well.

CHORUS.

To the shepherds who their sheep
On the lonely hill-tops keep
Hath the drowsy demon sped,
To besprinkle every head
With the charmed Lethéan wave
Which the shores of hell doth lave.

ADIEL.

Fiends, give me certain answer ! Think not thus
My searching to evade.

HECATE.

We told thee true !

ADIEL.

Oh breeder of all evil, did the truth
E'er come from lips defiled and black as thine ?

HECATE.

— Or a more senseless question e'er from thine !

ADIEL.

Peace ! I will hold no parley with your crew :
Say, whither went your black-wing'd messenger ?

HECATE.

Sure, I had thought such bright-plumed shapes as
 thou
Had known without our aid such things as this !

ADIEL.

It were not well to tempt me. Speak at once ;
Ye know the penalty.

HECATE.

[*To the fiends.*]

Speak then, ye must.

CHORUS.

He hath gone to visit them
Who in lonely Bethlehem
Keep their flocks 'neath starry light,
Singing all the livelong night.

ADIEL.

Hence then, begone ! No more from your foul
mouths.

HECATE.

Ha, ha !

ADIEL.

Laugh on ! but think not always thus
Just vengeance to escape so easily.

CHORUS.

Ha, ha ! Ha, ha ! ere morrow's dawn
What though hell await —

ADIEL.

Begone !

[They disappear with infernal laughter.]

What horrid sounds ! and what a dismal den !
Such sights oh may I never see again.

Scene changes. A wild place near the cave. Enter Reuel, apparently much bewildered; his crook and a lamb in his arms. He approaches the mouth of the cave. As the light falls on him, he starts back affrighted. Adiel comes out in the form of a beautiful female.

REUEL.

Tell me fair lady, or fair angel else
— All lonely, lost and wandering as I be —
Which way I should prefer to lead me hence
Towards Bethlehem, my father's home and mine.
Seeking a straying lamb, I far have strayed,
And overtaken by the moonless night
Know not the way which leads me to my cot
From the deceitful path that tempts my feet
To danger, or to distance dangerous too.

ADIEL.

Fear not good shepherd. I will guide thee hence,
Myself just starting for the hills which thou
Hast named thy home. Nor are they far from here,
Though true, the way is most obscure, and thou
No doubt by fiendish leading hast been brought
To this foul spot, but little known I ween

To eyes so simple and so pure as thine.

REUEL.

Fiendish indeed ! All hell seems out to-night,
And the charm'd air is full. As here I passed
I heard them mocking at my wilderment,
And when their hollow jeers had died away
And left me doubly maz'd, — then, worse than all
Came their wild laughter on the loaded breeze —
As if the spirits of the damn'd let loose
Were all afloat to chase, and mock at me
While the chill night-wind cools their burning
pains.

ADIEL.

Thou'st wander'd to a dreary place good swain,
And well for thee that here I chanc'd to turn !
Not many who have heard what thou hast heard
Have e'er escaped to tell their misery.
But I'm thy guide ; the midnight hastes, and we
Ere midnight must in David's city be.

Scene changes. An apartment in Jerusalem. Elizabeth discovered sitting by a couch on which is reposing the infant John. Zacharias enters.

ZACHARIAS.

How fares our boy?

ELIZABETH.

Come see him where he sleeps—
Could aught but health such ruddiness impart
To his full cheek? How soft and fresh he breathes!
Look, he is dreaming! Visions sure of joy
Are gladdening his rest; and ah, who knows
But waiting angels do converse in sleep
With babes like this!

ZACHARIAS.

So pure is infancy,
That well I ween if angel-lips at all
In their kind love converse with fallen men,
'Tis when as yet no sin hath stain'd their souls,
And when as now, they scarcely wear the form
Of Adam's erring sons.

ELIZABETH.

'Tis when as now
A cherub might mistake our rosy boy
For a reposing mate!

ZACHARIAS.

True he is fair —

And smiles in sleep as beautiful as erst
Young Moses did within his bulrush car,
When Egypt's princess rapt him from the Nile
And blush'd to see her own sweet bloom outvied.

ELIZABETH.

Oh may he prove like that young Moses too
Forerunner of a brighter e'en than he,
And herald of a Saviour that shall lead
The wandering people to eternal rest.

ZACHARIAS.

Such shall he surely be, for so indeed
The angel that announced him promised us.
And blessed be the Lord of Israel
Who thus hath visited our captive tribes
And raised a mighty horn of sure defence
From David's royal line. And thou my child
The prophet of the Highest shall be called —
To go before his face, prepare his ways
To raise the valleys, make full low the hills,
And bid the wilderness and desert place

Bud forth and blossom like the rose to be
A highway for his feet. Thy herald voice
Shall give the people freedom from offence
Through the kind mercy of our God, whereby
The Dayspring from on high hath beamed afar
To light the nations that in darkness dwell
And us lone wanderers through this vale of death.

ELIZABETH.

Oh 'twas of Him the prophet spoke of yore—
The voice of one that from the wilderness
Comes heralding the Lord. Bright pioneer !
What though his dwelling in the wastes shall be—
On Hermon's dewy top or Carmel fair,
Or in some chilly cave of Lebanon
Where roofs of shining icicles o'erhang,
And on his sleep their frozen mists distil—
Or though his voice be heard from Amana—
His meat the honey shed from Shenir's trees—
His drink of mossy fount, or running brook
From rocks rude-cloven gushing ; though he wear
Nor pall of tissued gold, nor broider'd robe ;
Though his rough garment from the beast be torn
And no sweet lawn or web from foreign loom

Enwrap his goodly limbs—yet hail his lot !
Thou child shalt be the first of woman born
Mid mortal men ; and more I do delight
That on my breast I've nursed thee, noble boy,
And seen thy pouting lips draw nurture there
Than if from me had sprung an empire's heir,
And I with prophet-ear could hear afar
A royal line and princes call me mother.

[*Ithial appears to them.*]

ZACHARIAS.

But look ! with awe — Oh, Spirit pure and fair —

ELIZABETH.

Ah, no ! with awe I bend —

ITHIEL.

Nay, fear ye not,
But hail, thrice favour'd pair ! I come to bid
Your speedy presence at lone Bethlehem,
Where ere the morn your happy eyes shall see
— As whilom by the angel's voice foretold
Your Lord, on earth the blessed virgin's son.

ZACHARIAS.

Thanks radiant stranger for the welcome word !

And not with fear, yet oh with reverent awe,
The homage that thy high estate demands
We yield with voice, and hearts in unison.
Right glad will we obey — Oh how is this
That e'er mine eyes such glory should behold
As throned kings and prophets were denied !

ITHIEL.

Haste then ; with reverent worship hail your King,
The Shiloh promis'd long to Israel —
And speedy be, or ere it is too late,
For even now the night doth wane apace
And I to other office must away.

[He disappears.]

ELIZABETH.

[With emotion.]

And who this shape of heav'n ?

ZACHARIAS.

An angel he,
That bids us haste to Bethlehem ; for there
Is born he saith —

ELIZABETH.

— I heard the joyful word !

But shall I more admire that Christ is come
Or that mine eyes have angel shapes beheld !
— Yet what are angels, when I soon shall see
Him too, that rides upon the cherubim !
Joy to the hour ! Right gladly will I go
And aye, with reverent adoration bow
Where our sweet hope on Mary's breast is laid,
And heaven's high King was tenant of her womb.

ZACHARIAS.

Come then, nor long delay. The time is scant
Though full our joy, and we have far to go.

*Scene changes. A lawn. Shepherds discovered
at rest, and Somnus bending over them, with a
green bough in his hand, which he shakes as
he sings.*

SOMNUS.

Thus with branch of hellish tree
Charmed with magic potency,
I besprinkle all your eyes
With what Lethe's wave supplies.

Sleep ye then, nor wake till morn
Shall the rosy east adorn.

[*He disappears.*]

Adiel enters with Reuel.

REUEL.

Ho ! here they are full sure, and fast asleep,
I left them to bring back one straying lamb,
And find them losing scores.

Come, rouse ye drones !

Ho here ! awake ! What mean ye thus at rest !

ADIEL.

Soft, Reuel, they are spell-bound ; and I see
The fiend that led thee from thy path astray
Hath played his potent magic on these swains,
And by his wizard art hath drugg'd their souls
With herbs from Tartarus.

REUEL.

And are they dead ?

ADIEL.

No, but in sleep unnatural and charmed :
Thou couldst not wake them shouldst thou call
till morn.

There is some demon's signet on their eyes,
And chance their spirits feel the poison too.

REUEL.

I've heard it said these sudden swoonds do come
From certain herbs that blow perchance too near ;
And some pretend there is an urchin sprite
That lived in Eden once, and has e'en now
His home and haunt on beds of asphodel,
That visits oft the fays of other flowers,
And makes sweet wooing of a starry night
To tiny maids that sleep on daffodils
And in the virgin-lily shelter them.
No mortal eye can spy their elfin loves,
Yet these are they that ope and shut the flowers ;
And often when they would abroad to dance
In pigmy shape beneath the smiling moon,
They send their wizard spouse and champion
To guard away each human foot and eye.
'Tis then that if a shepherd be too near
He feels strange drowsiness, and swoons away ;
For in their eyes he pours such influence,
And in their nostrils breathes such odours too,
As will anon quite steal them from themselves

And in oblivion shadow them awhile.
Perchance 'tis only this that chaineth these :
But I've an herb that can unfetter them.

ADIEL.

Nay Reuel, they have stronger shackles on ;
No herb can loose them ; but there is a name
That only whisper'd breaks the strongest bonds,
And I — good chance, have learn'd the potent
word.

And will annul the spell. My skill shall take
The scales from off their eyelids. Hear me now,
And mark what I enjoin thee. Dost thou hear !

REUEL.

I hear, and will obey thee.

ADIEL.

When I go,
I'll leave these swains unspell-bound — but asleep.
Asleep, I say — but only in such drowse
As nature gives them — which one word of thine
May easily dispel. Dost understand ?

REUEL.

Aye, and remember too.

ADIEL.

So speaking then
With kind good-morrow to the slumberers,
Awake them ; bid them sleep no more to-night,
But pass what resteth of its starlit hours
In innocent rejoicings and in songs.
And mark the hint I give thee — He who rules
The wide o'erstretching firmament and lives
In light unspeakable —amid the throng
Of flaming seraphim, above all height
And throned in glory, nathless hath an eye
Of love on such as thou ; and with more joy
Beholds these humble swains, than tetrarchs deckt
In gold and costly purple, and may yet
If ye be watchful, yield to your poor eyes
Surpassing witness of his dear regard.
For this, spend not all night in idle songs
And senseless ditties of unworthy love,
But partly sing *his* praise in echoing hymns,
As did of old on these same hills I ween
The youthful shepherd that was after king.
So fare thee well ! my words thy heart shall cheer
'Till future things their mystic sense shall show.

[*Adiel disappears.*]

REUEL.

Sure I have had a more than mortal guide !
Some goddess doubtless whom the heathen praise.
Or rather, I bethink me — liklier one.
Of those bright spirits that obey the will
Of heaven's blest Sov'reign — who are constant
round

The servants of the highest, numberless
As those that seen in Dothan cheer'd the eyes
Of the despairing servant of the seer.
An angel then ! and one whose words foretell
Some strange event that I no doubt shall see !
Oh wondrous night, that seems a chequer'd dream
And omens something that I long to know !
But soft ! let me perform what I am bid
And rouse these dreamers that enchanted lie.

[*Calls.*]

Ho here ! awake, what ho ! ye drowsy swains !

[*First Shepherd awakes.*]

'Tis wonderful if yonder flock be full
So long untended by your lazy crooks.

SHEPHERD.

Well Reuel ! you have found us sleeping, true,
But how 'tis so I wot not. I believe

That none are lost if I espy aright
Of yonder quiet herd — but all are safe.
Belike the nipping breeze hath chilled us through
And numb'd our senses to oblivion.
But let's bestir, and rouse these others too,
Our songs shall keep us from such fault again.
[*Calls.*]

Good morrow Shepherds ! Come, no longer sleep,
But brush the heavy slumber from your eyes.
[*They wake confusedly.*]

REUEL.

Well swains, I'm safe return'd and find *you* thus
O'ercome by sleep, and tasting sweet repose,
While I, forsooth, with labour and deep search
Have scoured the valley and the stony hill,
The dell, the dark ravine, the wilderness,
And all in patient quest of this poor lamb,
While 'tis no thanks to you that many more
Need not such searching. Careful shepherds ye !

A SHEPHERD.

'Tis passing strange ! We must have been asleep,
And yet how can it be ! We are not wont
To sleep so early, or to sleep at all

Upon our watch. So pardon for this once
Such strange remittance of our faithful care.

FIRST SHEPHERD.

Thou know'st no watch can guard 'gainst subtle
sleep

That cometh not a warrior to th' assault,
But stealeth like a coward unawares,
Or like the vapours of a sorceress' bowl
Charming the keepers of the citadel,
And one by one o'ermastering all within,
Till drowned at length in dull unconsciousness
The stupid inmates yield the fortress key
And wily sleep lets all her army in,
Visions, and sights, and dreams.

REUEL.

Thou sayest well —

The warrior that hath slain a thousand men
Yields up to sleep ; and Samson that of old
Made such fell havoc with th' uncircumcis'd
When he had worn out love with Dalilah
Sunk in her trait'ress arms o'ercome by sleep,
And lost his sacred locks — whose ev'ry hair
But for this sleep, had been an army still.

For such her art, she wins the strongest most,
And traps the most secure ; and oft 'tis found
That watchfulness grown weary of itself
Goes out in dreaming that 'tis wakeful still.
So there's no blame to you. No harm is done,
And I'll not mock you more. But yet 'tis strange
That all of you should be so dull at once !
— What hour is it suppose ye ?

FIRST SHEPHERD.

It must be
Nigh to the middle watch.

ANOTHER.

Nay, not so late —

FIRST SHEPHERD.

Then we have longer to await the day.

REUEL.

But come, the air is chill, and dark the night
And long 'twill be or ere the cheering moon
Shall rise o'er yonder hill-top. Rouse ye then
And let us to our singing.

FIRST SHEPHERD.

Well, what song —

THE LAMB ASTRAY, OR JOY FOR WHAT IS FOUND ?

ANOTHER.

Nay, but our old night cheering chorus—

REUEL.

What,

The WAKEFUL SHEPHERDS !

SHEPHERD.

Aye, 'tis so content.

REUEL.

And so befitting you, who've waked so long
And wearily !

FIRST SHEPHERD.

I thought we were to hear
No more of that ! You told us so at least.

REUEL.

Forgive me ! It was meant in harmless jest.
I thought some sport would suit you.

A SHEPHERD.

But a song

Had suited better.

REUEL.

Join then one and all,
For so we'll cheat the watches, and make glad
The tedious hours. No more of jest or laugh —
All things invite our singing. Peaceful sleep
Our fleecy charges, and the starlight dim
With gentle influence calms their tranquil rest
And gives them quiet dreams. Our song the more
Shall lull their wakings, and with magic power
Shall cheer us too. Come then, my reed is tuned,
And joyfully I lead the merry lay.

THE SONG.

Lone on these hills our watch we keep,
And guard our fleece-clad sheep
Till the balm morning break —
And still with songs of cheer
Charming her sulky ear,
Night's echoes wake.

CHORUS.

So pass the lagging hours, so wanes the night
Till morn appears in pearly splendour dight.
And kind the stars above
Glowing with tender love

With us keep watch 'till day.
For us the Pleiads seven
Shine sentinels of heaven
Till shadows flee away.

CHORUS.

Till rising bright the morning star
Rosy and ruddy beams afar.

No deadly thing is here
To strike our hearts with fear
Or harm the flocks we keep,
We envy not the great
Preferring to their state
Our fleecy sheep.

CHORUS.

So happily we'll watch, so merry wake
Till in the east the golden day-spring break.

And thus with songs of cheer
Till ruddy dawn draws near
Night's drowse we'll wake —
Till darkness flies afar,
Till beams the morning star —
And that blest dawning break.

CHORUS.

Till darkness flieth, and the day
Darts through the east his rosy ray.

FIRST SHEPHERD.

How liked you it ?

REUEL.

As ever ; 'tis my favourite !

*[The Shepherdesses approach with Serah bringing
various kinds of fruits.]*

A SHEPHERD.

But see, our sisters come ! and with them too,
Another fav'rite, Reuel !

REUEL.

Aye, I see —

The lovely Shepherdess !

[To them.]

Ye come full well,

Just in the time ! and bringing such regale
You ne'er will be unwelcomed by us here.

FIRST SHEPHERDESS.

Brothers, we come to join you in your songs ;
Not without presents, but like Sheba's queen

Bringing sweet spices and delightful fruits,
The cluster'd grape, pomegranates cased in gold
And pulpy figs — a banquet fit for kings !

SERAH.

And we propose that when the gladsome moon
Begins to lighten up this rural scene,
— As soon she must, for even now her beams
Behind yon hill illuminate the sky —
We join in sportive pastime, and gay dance
O'er the soft lawn.

REUEL.

That we shall like full well.

And lovely Serah, if thou wilt, again
We'll tread the tripping measure which we last
Together danced, when Autumn's heavy sheaves
Stored in the garner, gave us harvest-home.

A SHEPHERDESS.

But of our feast take first.

REUEL.

Most willingly !

SERAH.

Come then, we spread it on the grass.

A SHEPHERD.

Good luck !

Worth bringing are such viands ; gather round,
We want no better tables than the ground.

Scene changes. A roadside. The Wise Men approach, gazing steadfastly on the moving star.

OMAR.

Still doth yon planet beckon us along
Slow moving, resting not, but shining mild
Like some divinity embodied there,
To lead us to his princely feet, who now
Is born in Jewry, Lord of all the earth.
Yet why in such a corner of the world
Or why in Bethlehem doth he appear,
If yet to shine of ev'ry land the Sun
And Conqueror of nations mightier far !
Is this fit nurs'ry for a prince ? Is this
The fitting climate for such royal growth !
Is this the land to nurture one who claims
The fealty of all mankind, and comes
O'er the whole earth high autocrat to reign
And rightful sov'reign of remotest isles !
Oh, my sage brothers, think you this can be !

Deep I surmise such birth were better sought
In haughty Cæsar's proud imperial home,
In rich Athené, or our own bright East
Amid the od'rous groves and spicy vales
Of Elam or of Ind. Would this not seem
More worthy such a King, more likely too ?
How think ye fellow-sages, have we come
On bootless errand — or do ye suppose
'Tis yet full time for his august approach
Whose glory we have come so far to see ?

A SAGE.

Most surely I believe the time has come
Sage father, for so all the world avers.
So says tradition, so our prophets old,
So testifies the Sybil, so divines
The Delphian priestess — so have we believed :
And so yon moving star more sure than all
Doth well approve.

ANOTHER.

And canst thou doubt the sign !
Thou knowest it hath been full long foretold
From Jacob that a new-born Star should rise,
And a bright glory out of Israel.

Oft since we saw this heavenly light appear,
I've heard, sage father, from thy lips divine
How that on Peor's top, to Beor's son
Appalled and quaking, shone a vision dread
What time a spirit o'er his eyelids past
And came a trance — although he did not sleep —
So that the sinews of his lips did quiver
And his dark locks stood upright — while a voice
Amid the stillness that was shadowy round
Spoke in dark whispers to his prophet soul
The warning that unheard by other ears
Told of the rising of this meteor pale —
And the far prospect of the star we see
Yet idly question while we feel its rays.

FIRST SAGE.

And doubtless then the seer's unveiled eyes
Saw 'mid that darkness that was awful round
The distant sparkling of this same bright star,
That now at length in full perfected time
Hath dawned on us.

OMAR.

I own thy reasons just,
Rememb'ring too what words the wizards spoke

Whom haughty Herod summoned at his call ;
"Thou Bethlehem art not the least among
Judean princes, for from thee shall spring
A ruler of my people Israel."

But still I marvel that a Prince so high,
So oft predicted, and so long desired,
Hath but this lowly land his realm at last.

FIRST SAGE.

Call it not lowly, for though wasted now
Ev'n in its ruin is a charm for me,
And in its hoary age a grandeur too.
Here every spot is sacred : every step
We reckless take, by heroes hath been trod,
By poets, sages, men of old renown,
And hath its tale, its fable, or its lay.
Here once was thron'd all-glorious Solomon
Mid riches that bright Ophir sent from far,
And deck'd with robes of Tyre's unrivall'd dye.
Here Hiram's navies brought their wealth to him,
And many a year his ships from Tarsish came
With tribute for the king of Israel,
Cedars, and gold, and shining ivory,
Birds of bright rainbow plumage, silver urns,

And algum-wood for harps and psalteries.
There come no more such gifts as Hiram gave !
Here Sheba's queen with homage sought him too,
Nor thought her coming to a lowly land
When with her train, her gems and spicery,
And her own beauty as her peerless dower,
She paid him worship as the King of kings.
Oh, 'tis a land of kings — of poets, seers,
Wise men and holy, priests and prophets sage,
And the best home of heav'nly poesy,
Since here the poet was the monarch too.
A good old land ! a land of lore and song !
A land most famous in the olden time —
A land where ev'ry worn-out furrow tells
They were a hero race that broke it first.
Think what it once has been, and in decay
Mark yet the grandeur of the crumbled pile —
Then rev'rence glory fled, and weep that thus
Earth's goodliest, noblest, brightest — dies at last.

A N O T H E R .

And e'en though Jewry *were* a lowly land,
And this his home thrice lowly — yet for us
Who beckoned hitherward by heavenly signs,

And led as never men were led before,
Have wandered weary from the outskirt East
Now to begin our errand to mistrust,
Would seem at least too tardy to be wise.

O M A R.

So seems it ; and perplexed I question much
Our knowledge of our own adventure here,
And think perchance we may have erred somewhat
In his mysterious office whom we seek.
Oh may that blessed power our minds illumine
Whose heavenly call hath beckoned us afar !

F I R S T S A G E.

But look ! the wondrous light is settling now —
Perchance to mark the princely roof where he
This royal babe in regal state is laid.

O M A R.

Yes ! let us haste. We must be near his home.
And look once more ; a fairer light draws near
In gait and form a God !

[*Ithiel is seen approaching.*]

FIRST SAGE.

I see ! perchance

'Tis Hermes the wing'd messenger of Jove
Whom Greeks adore.

OMAR.

Ah no, more fair than he !

For look what glory in his wings resides,
What brightness in his golden-threaded locks,
With what divinity he moves along —
More fair than all the gods of Greece ! But soft,
He comes — receive him with due reverence, and
kneel.

Ithiel enters, and the Sages fall prostrate before him.

ITHIEL.

Rise blessed Sages, kneel not unto me,
Myself a creature and a servant too
Scarce nobler than yourselves — a messenger
Of Him who makes the winds his angels oft,
And flaming fire his minister to be.

OMAR.

Bright spirit, how shall we receive thee then !

How pay thee homage due ! Thy radiance pure
Strikes us with awe ! how can we else than kneel ?

ITHIEL.

I bid you kneel no longer. Rise, or bow
To God alone !

OMAR.

We rise then at thy will.
But think not that in deference we fail,
Or in high worship of thy mightier power.

[*They rise.*]

FIRST SAGE.

[*In amazement.*]

But sure the gods are come !

ITHIEL.

The gods indeed !

Or rather that *one* God whom I declare
To your blest hearing. Think not letter'd seers
The babe ye seek is born an earthly king,
Or yet a victor of the nation's lords,
Or ever such to reign, until a time
Remote, and still in distant vista seen
By blest anointed eyes. Ye come to see

No pompous pageant of imperial show,
No royal infant girt with princesses
And queens about him for his ministry —
A God ye seek, and yet a God not laid
On stuffs of tap'stry and embroidered gold,
Nor cradled soft like fabled Iamus
Upon boon nature's own maternal bed,
Mid violets and roses gemm'd with dew —
But neath a lowly shed — a manger's roof —
Nursed on the breast of fair humility,
And lodged in cribs where toiling oxen feed,
There doth he rest — a God — the God who rules
The earth, and all earth's people, and who rolls
O'er heaven's high pathway oft his thundering car,
And hurls full frequent thence on guilty heads
The fierce far-flaming flashes of his ire —
A God who in the storm is heard, and terrible
Comes in the giant whirlwind, and who heaves
The surging billows high against the clouds —
But yet a God who lays his might aside
— His arm than famed Alcides' stronger far —
And here in poor Ephrata, which ye see
On yon ridged hill, not distant, doth become

The bright first born of pure virginity
And David's nobler son.

OMAR.

With deep amaze

All radiant stranger thy instructions sage
And marvellous, we hear ; yet would inquire
(If not profane to ask) their meaning hid
And scarce contain'd by our surprised ears.
More would we know, and chance thy blessed Lord
Hath sent thee to direct our groping minds,
And all these mystic doctrines to explain.
What mean they then, and how can these things be !

ITHIEL.

Right ye surmise, for with swift wings I come,
Sent by my Lord your willing guide to be
And to instruct you in these hidden things,
(For hidden things they are, yet simple too,)
That with due knowledge ye may greet his reign,
And at his feet your princely homage pay.
Then follow me, for I will guide your feet
In the soft paths of pleasantness and peace ;
And as we linger on our way, will show
The wonders that in Jewry have been wrought,

And why this infant God is lowly born
Whose festive advent stars and angels tell.

OMAR.

We yield thee thanks, and gladly we accept
Such heavenly pilot of our darksome way.
Still would we listen to thy gentle voice —
Still learn true wisdom in sweet music drest,
And with our hearts athirst for things divine —
We beg thy kind illuming as we go.

*Scene changes. The Shepherds' lawn ; the banquet
over, and the dance just ended.*

REUEL.

And now our tripping measures at an end,
Our feast partaken, and our sports worn out,
Let us once more to song !

SERAH.

Nay, we must go !
Sure the gray dawn would catch us still at play
If thou wert master of our merriment.

REUEL.

Well, I *am* master ; and before we part

Sure Serah thou wilt sing that lovely lay,
Which, as though wont to vie with cherubim
Thy voice to numbers gives. 'Tis fitting time,
And soft at this lone hour the notes will swell,
More dulcet for the trillings, which the hills
Will echo to the woodlands: and 'tis right
That in our pastime we should praise Him, too,
Whose coming, long our sorrowing tribes have
hoped,
Whose advent, at the farthest, must be near.

A SHEPHERD.

Nay Reuel, thou'st a sombre taste to-night !
Give me some gayer air, some lovelit lay,
Some song, some dance, some moonlight serenade.
Old David's self, that used to pasture here
His father's flocks, had weary been of hymns
That suit far better Sabbath's synagogue,
Than shepherds' lawns, and these enchanting
maids.

SERAH.

Out shepherd ! David was not always old !
Speak not so lightly of the noble bard
For whom e'en yet Judea's daughters weep.

He was as lusty and as proud a youth
As e'er won woman's smile ; and to the eye,
As lordly and as fair to look upon
As e'er young virgin dream'd of. Oh, no more
Are found such bridegrooms for the Hebrew girl !
Yet ever was his harp attun'd for heaven,
Nor ever was his lay of aught below,
For his the lyre that rais'd him up from earth,
To breathe heaven's purest ether while he sung.

SHEPHERD.

Aye Serah, and full oft, 'tis said, he flew
Above the stars, beyond the firmament,
Within the veil that hides the Holy One,
And heard heaven's music there.—'Tis known as
well

He oft descended too : and he that soar'd,
Wetting his wing in pure ambrosial dews,
And higher rising to empyreal light,
And gazing fearless on the opal throne,
Yet stoop'd full oft where woman's beauty wooed ;
And joyed as well in her sweet love, I ween,
When fair Bathsheba, blushing like the morn,
Left Uri's bosom for his own fond arms,

As ever, when on rapture's wings he rose
Where cherubs chaunt, and seraphs veil'd adore.

SERAII.

And ever thus 'twas poet's privilege
To live 'twixt earth and heav'n. And some more
gross
Have honour'd only their terrestrial home,
While bards of nobler spirit dwell on high ;
There seek those forms of beauty that on earth
Though hov'ring in their fancy, flee their arms ;
And in such angel-converse, such sweet love,
Roaming in light, mid islands of the blest,
They live above the world — with gods they live,
And only stoop, when back to earth allur'd
By eyes as seraph-like as aught in heav'n.

SHEPHERD.

Yet, more than such, I praise sage Solomon.
He was the lordliest of all earthly kings,
The noblest of all earthly poets too —
And ever was his lay of woman's love,
Of Salem's bright-eyed girls, of Sheba's queen ;
And mid a thousand wooing concubines
He lived, and was a minstrel monarch still.

SERAH.

Nay, Shepherd, for the sage became a fool,
And lost his god-lit lyre : with dotage tame,
Melting the priceless pearl of poesy
In the sweet draught of woman's opiate love.
And for those thousand girls that smiled on him,
A thousand wings of cherubs, brighter-eyed,
That o'er his harp with inspiration hung,
Fled his ungrateful service, and awhile
Left him with leman, and with paramour,
To learn what earthly love alone can do.

REUEL.

I do remember of a lay I've heard,
Writ by some Rabbin of the olden time ;
(A quaint old story with a moral in't
That told how Joseph from Zuleika fled,
And of the elders when Susannah bathed —
Which oft my father would to me repeat
Beneath the shady palms, a summer's day,
While there reclin'd we watch'd our flocks hard by)
That all its opening was a long lament
O'er those sad times, when sons of God forgot
The homes where they were natives, and anon
Came flying down to wed with lovely clay.

For there were angels once — the story went,
That hovering, aye, too near this baser world,
Did on a time alight upon its hills —
Forgetful of the regions whence they sprung,
And lured like charmed birds in Eden's bowers,
That lulled by magic of the serpent's eye
Did often fall from their sweet Paradise,
To warn our mother Eve of that worse fall,
Which Adam wept, and nature weeps, and we.

SERAH.

And such those poets shepherd, that first form'd
To sing on high and lure us to the skies,
Themselves have hover'd round our lower soil —
Till charm'd with earth — base earth has dragg'd
them down !

REUEL.

And on these flowery hills the angels stood,
Lighted where flowers were fairest ; and well
pleas'd
Awhile they loiter'd in the balmy shade.
'Twas sweet to rest their wings that soar'd so high,
And there delighted did they roam at large,

'Till longing for companionship, at length
They wander'd forth to seek earth's habitants —
If chance such pleasant homes might hold their
peers.

And in the merry wood, they met one day
Men's fairest daughters — angels though unwing'd,
At once in love — from out the fairy group
They chose the loveliest mates that e'er were
wooded.

And long in nuptial bowers they dallied then ;
And long mid groves, and shades, and leafy nooks,
They lived and loved, now laid in glitt'ring grot,
Now roving through the forest far and free,
And now by sparkling streamlet loitering,
Or glassy lake, that mirror'd back, I ween,
Forms such as since were never. By their side,
Anon were seen bright boys and fair-hair'd girls,
Children of beauty, by immortals sired.

— How happy were their days ! The golden age
Was this, and heathen have the tale.

They were undying, and through long, long years
Felt no decay. Their cherish'd fair-ones, too,
Were blooming still. — Twas in old Noah's time,
When man as yet did number all his days.

And so they tearless lived ; and wedded now
With Adam's children, they like him forgot
The God whose goodness made all earth so fair,
And His sweet smile, who breath'd them into
bloom.

And chance till now, or till the flood at least
Swept the old world with all its pride away,
Those angel-lovers would have known no tears —
But on a day, when least they thought or dream'd
Of such surprisal — lo ! a seraph comes —
— Heaven's sweetest odours on his plummy wings,
And girt with breezes, whose ambrosial scent
Did mind the wand'ers of their far-off home.
Fair, godlike, bright he stood. The truants
blush'd —

With downcast looks they hid their tarnish'd wings,
And waking from their dreamy lovewrought spell,
They knew their glory gone. Their peer the while
Erect, and like all beauty bodied forth,
Nor parley'd with them, nor inquir'd their weal.
Backward he drew, and, as in wonderment,
Folding his wings, he paused a moment there.
Then, with such speaking smile as angels use
When they would scorn — ' Poor fallen earthlings
ye.'

At length he spoke, 'love still your earth-born
mates !

If in those arms, those breasts, ye take delight,
Oh woo them still ; they're beautiful though dust !'
He touch'd them — and they felt their pinions
shrink.

He vanish'd, and with him they strove to rise.
They strove in vain : their plumes were useless
now.

With tears first shed, they turned to earth to weep ;
But horror — on the sward that meet their eyes,
— The rosy breath just ebbing from their lips,
In death's embrace, and withering back to dust —
Lay the vain beauties that had cost them heav'n.
Oh, vain to tell what follow'd of their wo !

Hapless immortals ! To this hour, unseen
They haunt the spot that saw their anguish then,
And hover o'er the turf that drank their tears.

'Tis in old Charran, by Euphrates' wave.

And there, the wand'rer even now may hear
— If chance at lonely hour he pass that way —
Voices in air that wail their misery ;

That weep for heaven, though long estranged from
there ;

That mourn their angel-mates, abandon'd once ;

That doomed to live, yet howl for death their
prayer

— A seraph's yearning for a mortal's grave.

Forgive me that so long I weary you ;

But ev'n like these do seem those bards to me,

Who, sons of God, forget their royal home ;

Who form'd for heav'n, yet leave its purer air :

Who stoop below to find them earthly mates ;

Who waste long years in dalliance and soft love,

Nor e'er again do stretch their wings to soar,

Till all too late, they find them chain-bound here,

And linked to earth by fetters of their own.

SERAPH.

Ah, who can paint the after doom of such,

Or, who can tell what pangs their spirits bear !

No doubt, where e'er they live, their souls the more

Feel the keen suffering, as in earlier days

They better knew each subtle form of joy,

And deeper drank of beauty's flowery bowl.

Such ever be their fate. They earned it well ;

They made fair Poesy a leman loose,

Not wooed her as a virgin undefiled,

Nor gave their heart to her, that gave them all.

Some say, our God himself first taught to man
The feeling and the speech of poesy,
And in a favor'd heart, first planted deep
The seeds that since have grown into a tree,
Too, like that tree of knowledge — poisonous,
Though luscious to the taste ; and some pretend
That angels only, did the language teach
Of harp and lute — their own first-fashioning —
To Jubal, who was father of all such
As handle strings and swelling organ well.
But all confess that it did come from heaven.
Then, oh what shame it should forget its birth !
What crime its hymmings should of Moloch be,
Of Baal, of Remphan, of the golden calf,
But never of the God who father'd it,
Who is himself all-perfect poetry,
Whose being is all beauty, all sublime,
Whose breath is music, and his thunder too.

SHEPHERD.

I see that Reuel hath outargued me
In thy too partial hearing ; but no more !
Sing Serah as thou wilt, for in thy heart
Full well I know my fav'rite is thine own.

SERAH.

Bethink thee, swain, 'twas Solomon that sung
How all is vanity. Those angel wings
Did visit him again or ere he died,
And then — like poet-birds that heathens tell of,
That dying pour their sweetest minstrelsy —
His soft, persuasive, dulcet numbers flowed,
Beseeching thee, in early youth, to learn
His tender love, whose love alone doth live,
And his sweet praise, ere colder days draw nigh,
When thy shrunk heart shall find no joy in him.

SHEPHERD.

Thy words o'ermaster me ! Oh, gentle girl
Thou hast advantage in thy speaking eyes ;
I always could outargue woman's words,
But woman's glances ever vanquish me.
Now let thy pure lips give sweet sounds to heav'n !
Sure thou shalt sing, and we will join the praise.
Thou hast convinc'd us all.

REUEL.

And Serah well
Thy poet tongue hath proved the poet's part.

Now sing for me, and if thy lips as well
Have learn'd sweet numbers, as sweet reasoning,
Thou need'st not weep that David's days are done,
Or that his harp, so eloquent erewhile,
On Babel's willows long ago was mute.

SERAH.

With joy persuasive shepherd I obey.
'Twere pleasure in itself to sing for thee,
And oh, thrice pleasure when I sing to Him,
Whose praise by Egypt's plague-tormented sea,
By Silo's fount, or waves of Babylon,
The Hebrew maid hath ever at her heart.

THE SONG.

The wilderness shall bloom
And blossom like the rose —
And desert-places shall be green,
And Salem rise in royal sheen,
As when the morning glows.

CHORUS.

Smile desert-place and wilderness
And blossom like the rose,
Thy Monarch comes, and all thy waste
Like od'rous Sharon blows.

And lo ! a virgin womb
 Shall bear a royal son ;
A branch shall bud from Jesse's rod,
The Prince of Peace — the mighty God —
 The everlasting One !

CHORUS.

Smile desert-place and wilderness
 And blossom like the rose,
For lo ! he comes, and all thy waste .
 Like flowery Carmel blows.

Rise from thy lowly doom,
 Daughter of Salem rise !
The dawning morn is nigh ;
The dayspring from on high
 Beams on thy tearful eyes.

CHORUS.

Smile desert-place and wilderness
 And blossom like the rose,
And smile, sad land, thy King hath come,
 And vanish'd are thy foes.
And lo ! the lonely wilderness
 Like blooming Eden blows.

SERAH.

And now we go. So, Reuel, till we meet,
Heaven with you be —

A SHEPHERDESS.

And all of you farewell !

REUEL.

Farewell, gay creatures, if we thus must part,
And some good spirit guide you on your way !
Time was when it had been most dangerous
(Judging by stories of the olden day)
For such rare beauty to appear abroad
At hours so late. But now the times are changed,
And chang'd (by wonder !) advantageously.
Ye need not fear ; for in the shadow'd wood
No sworded outlaw lurks in wait to-night,
Nor prowls the spoiler of the maiden there ;
Though even such would fear to injure *you*,
And well I ween, Lot's worst co-citizens
Had failed in heart such purity to mar.

SERAH.

Our cot is near, we shortly shall be there —

REUEL.

And, Serah, I will seek thee there betimes.
I have a something I would say to thee —
And I with garlands must repay thy song,
That hath outvied young Eden's nightingale,
But more reminds me of the turtle's voice,
That, when balm spring first makes her musical,
Is heard at eve, oft warbling to her love
Such notes as nature, when she hears, improves,
And warms to dalliance soft his fond desire.

SERAH.

Nay, let me rather be sweet Philomel !
She drinks from flowery urns heaven's purest
 dews,
And oft, when hymning to the starry night,
Charms the bright cherubs, that on rosy wings
Bend through the mists to list her warbled lay,
And learn themselves, from earthly worshippers,
Diviner music for their harps above.

REUEL.

Then be it as thou wilt ; an angel well
Might pause and hover where thy voice allures !

SERAH.

Ha ! I am pausing here, allur'd by thine !
But now no more ; we leave you to the stars ;
Blest be your watching !

REUEL.

May the stars leave us
When ye depart. But peace your steps attend !

A SHEPHERD.

And our most hearty thanks ! we owe you much
For your sweet singing, and your rich regale.

[*Exeunt.*]

Thus far, indeed, we've had a merry watch
Beneath such starlight as not often shines !

REUEL.

Aye, would that oft'ner such sweet starlight shone,
As from their tender eyes, they sparkled down
On our late vigils ! Stars they are, indeed,
And Serah worthiest of the title fair —
Mild morning-star ! or like yon queenly moon,
That smiles as in meek glory on she moves,
And rules the chiming of her sister spheres.

A SHEPHERD.

Come, then, let us repeat the lay they sung,
Or wake new notes responsive to their praise ;
For still I more admire those holy hymns
Which rapt Isaiah's seraph-harp inspir'd,
Or on King David's lyre first rose to God,
Than aught our other bards have vainly sung,
Or we ourselves with rude ill-favour'd art,
In past'ral sport, to `past'ral songs have set.
And sure the praises of our God befit
The season, and the hour, and our poor tongues,
Far more than idle ditties to the stars,
Or sick'ning lays of loves we do not feel !

REUEL.

Thou sayest well. No melody of love,
No merry notes that light the gamesome dance,
No incense pæan chaunted in the way
Of laurelled victor triumphing from war,
No ditty fram'd for mistress or fair spouse,
No warbled blessing on the newly wed,
Nor hymeneal at the bridal trolled,
Hath such sweet magic for my simple ear,
As David's hallow'd minstrelsy hath shed
Round the sweet carols of Messiah's praise.

FIRST SHEPHERD.

Then breathe soft flute, I'll lead the goodly chaunt,
And chance high heaven may hear our humble joy.

THE SONG.

Hark, a glad voice ! Thy King doth come,
Salem thy glory show :
Behold ye blind and sing ye dumb,
And leap ye lame before your Lord,
As bounds the merry roe !

CHORUS.

So cometh he,
The blind shall see,
The deaf his voice shall hear ;
Oh, wake and dress thee gloriously !
Proud Salem rise ! apparel thee —
Thy Monarch doth appear.

Kind Shepherd of the fold,
His arms the lambs shall bear !
He leads them to the clearest streams,
To pastures ever fair.
He cometh — Salem wake again !
Thy vanished glory wear !

C H O R U S .

He cometh like the light,
He cometh like the day —
The nations shadow'd long in night,
Behold his rising ray.

He cometh from the wilderness,
Like incense-clouds that glow !
He cometh from the mountain-top,
He skippeth like the roe —
He cometh where his gardens bloom,
Where southern breezes waft perfume,
And spicy gales do blow.

C H O R U S .

The valley riseth, and he comes !
The hills are bending down.
Behold, proud land, thy Monarch comes !
He wears thine ancient crown !
Oh, hear his voice among the hills
And mid the forests brown !

R E U E L .

Shepherds ! Methought I heard soft answerings,

Sweet music far away ! Say, heard ye too?
Or am I still deceived ? for even now
I hear it, sure !

FIRST SHEPHERD.

Nay, I have heard no song,
Save our own lay, and echoes which the hills
Sent trilling back —

ANOTHER.

I heard what Reuel did !
'Twas but the echoes which the woodlands gave,
From yonder steep — such mimic sponsors they !

REUEL.

But list ! What hear ye now ? The stars have
join'd
Our past'ral concert, and with sphery songs
Give back our glad rejoicings.

Hark ! more clear,
And nearer still it comes. 'Tis from above,
And 'tis descending ! Sure ye hear it now !

FIRST SHEPHERD.

I hear a something, truly —

R E U E L.

'Tis the choir

Of minstrel-angels, that with golden harps
And vials breathing odours, gird the throne
Of radiant Godhead !

List ! with heavenly hymns,
They join the humble worship of our songs
And feeble voices.

A S H E P H E R D.

Nay, thou raillest, swain,
'Tis chance some other group of shepherd-lads
On neighb'ring hills, rejoicing e'en as we.

R E U E L.

Shepherds, I do not rail. But would it be
A marvel if my strange surmise were true ?
Bethink ye how of late the promis'd signs
Of our Immanuel's coming have appear'd —
The wonders, too, in Salem that have been
Since the archangel shone to Zachary,
At time of incense when he burned perfume.
Have ye not heard that in her barren age
Elizabeth hath borne a blooming boy,—

A marvel from his birth — and how his sire,
(Long by the angel's glory stricken dumb,)
Broke forth in prophet-rapture strange to all,
Naming his child Elias, and the Sent
Of heaven, to herald our Immanuel !
What wonder, then, if now Immanuel come ?
Strange sights I saw when I was gone afar
After the straying lamb. An angel guide
Did lead me homeward —

— But once more above !
Those strains are chiming nearer ; and, behold,
The welkin glows with brightness.

FIRST SHEPHERD.

Ah, I yield !
Or seraphs, or the choir of stars I hear —
And see, the firmament with silver light
Glitters and gleams !

ANOTHER.

Oh, see what streaming bands
Of glory swathe the pole !

REUEL.

'Tis dread to see !

The music scarce I hear ; for oh ! such light
Sure mortal eye hath ne'er beheld and liv'd.

FIRST SHEPHERD.

Such flashing beams ! all heaven seems coming
down,
Or heaven's all-flaming armies — on their wings
Of plummy lustre flying !

REUEL.

Lo ! the skies
Are opening. Wo for us ! our eyes behold
Forbidden glory !

A SHEPHERD.

Ah, I fear !

ANOTHER.

Alas !

Where shall we flee !

REUEL.

An angel comes, oh kneel !

*[Ithiel is seen descending. The Shepherds fall
backwards covering their faces.]*

He comes on rolling rays of glory down ;
How shall we worship !

SHEPHERDS.

Oh, the dazzling light !

• REUEL.

He comes, a seraph bright !

Ithiel enters.

ITHIEL.

Fear not good shepherds ! Far above
Were heard your grateful lays,
And these are choirs of heavenly love
That echo back your praise.

Fear not. The Lord is born !

In David's city, David's royal Son —
The shadowy types are done ;

He comes like rising morn
And haste ye to his feet ;

Oh, hasten to adore —

Rise, blessed swains, 'tis yours to greet
The presence prophets did entreat,
And kings desired of yore.

SHEPHERDS.

[With emotion.]

Ah, we shall never more
Behold the day—

I THIEL.

Fear not ! Behold on high
The glory beaming sky —
Behold, ye may !

R E U E L.

Ah no, we turn away !

I THIEL.

Nay, look above, and list their song—
They're gathering now — the heavenly throng.

[They look up in amazement.]

And see ! they come, the angel choir,
That sweep th' immortal lyre,
His birth to greet :
Upon the mountain-cloud,
Of glory 'neath them bowed,
How beautiful their feet !

Oh ye that bring good tidings, say
What of the passing night !

[Answered from above.]

It waneth ; and the day
Is rising bright.]

REUEL.

Ah me ! I die — the dazzling light !

ITHIEL.

Fear not, 'tis mercy bright.

REUEL.

What sang they then ?

ITHIEL.

Good-will to men—

REUEL.

No more I fear --

ITHIEL.

But hark, their cheer !

[*A chorus of angels is heard above.*]

CHORUS.

All glory to God in the highest,
Peace cometh to men of good-will !
Oh, praise him bright seraph that fliest —
Ye cherubs be praising him still !

SEMI-CHORUS.

Lift up thy portals, earth,
For he that gave thee birth
Forgives thy sin !

CHORUS.

Oh, earth, lift up thy gates,
The King of glory waits
To enter in !

ITHIEL.

And who this king of glory ?

SEMI-CHORUS.

'Tis he that spread the skies,

That bade the world arise,
That made the day —
That fixed the solid land,
That poured the ocean from his hand —

CHORUS.

And breathed the living soul in man's majestic clay.

Then lift thine arches high —
Oh, earth, receive thy King.
Behold he draweth nigh —
Before him seraphs fly,
On glory's wing !

Lift up, oh earth, thy gates,
The King of glory waits —
Ye everlasting doors be lifted high !

ITHIEL.

Who is this King of glory ?

CHORUS.

Seraphs, shout his story.
Echo through the crystal skies

Your lofty symphonies —
— Who is this King of glory ?

CHORUS OF SERAPHS.

'Tis he that breaks the spoiler's boasts,
That rules the tempest's rattle —
'Tis the Lord — the Lord of Hosts,
Our God so strong in battle ! —
Ope thy gates, oh earth, 'tis He
That hath built thee on the wave,
And fix'd thee on the sea —
He cometh girt with victory,
A Mighty One to save !

CHORUS OF ANGELS.

This the King of glory, then !
Ope thy gates, thine arches high —
Rise, oh captive land, again,
And shine — thy light is nigh —

CHORUS OF SERAPHS.

The nations seek thy rising Star —
Like doves of shining feather,
See how they hover from afar !

How bright their fluttering pinions are,
As home they fleet together !

The isles —

—The isles have waited long —

Where none before went through thee ;
See how the bending Gentiles throng !
They come, they gather to thee :

SEMI-CHORUS.

Put on thy strength, oh earth, awake,
For lo, the skies are bending !
O'er thee the beams of mercy break —
Thy Monarch is descending ;

CHORUS.

For this, the heavens are rending !

A FULL CHORUS.

Now we praise the King of glory ;
Thou art coming — not in wrath —
Not with conqueror's garments gory,
— Mercy beameth on thy path !
Now, to earth, a child is given,
Wonderful ! The Mighty God !

Everlasting Sire of Heaven —
Prince of Peace — His peaceful rod
O'er the nations is extending,
And for this the heavens are rending —
Earth, thy Monarch is descending !

CHORUS OF SERAPHS.

Softly now the morning beameth —
From the East the dayspring streameth —
Peace we leave, and mercy bright ;
— Now we vanish into light.

[The Seraphs disappear up into heaven.]

I THIEL.

They melt afar ! The flaming sky
Hath rapt their brightness from my eye ;
Yet, glory to our God on high —

SEMI-CHORUS.

[Still lingering.]

And peace below !
Back to our heavenly homes we fly ;
Yet, ere we go —

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

— While yet our wings are hov'ring nigh,
Our peace bestow.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS.

The dawn is near —
No more we stay,
Or linger here —
Away, away !

[They disappear.]

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS.

[Lingering.]

But first on earth
Our peace bestow —
And greeted now her Saviour's birth,
We go — we go !

[They disappear upwards.]

ITHIEL.

They've vanished — and the dawning light,
That streaks the east afar,
How faint it seems ! Their glory bright
Hath dimm'd the morning star !

[*To the Shepherds.*]

Go, swains, salute your new-born King !

Or ere the risen day.

Farewell — I must away —

[*Rises.*]

REUEL.

Ah, see ! he spreads his glittering wing —

A SHEPHERD.

Oh, stay —

Blest messenger of light, and guide our way !

ANOTHER.

It cannot be —

No more we see

Those wings of silver sheen —

REUEL.

He melts afar,

Like some bright star,

Through moonlight's glory seen !

Oh, up to purer day,

He's vanish'd, and away —

While we are lowly left on this poor shepherd's
green.

FIRST SHEPHERD.

Yet joy ! that our blest eyes
Have seen the flaming angel throng —
That come with chorus loud and long,
Bright seraphs' mighty numbers strong,
And warbling cherubim, that bring
A thousand harps of heavenly string,
— The music of the skies.

REUEL.

[Gazing upwards.]

Oh, earth is tame —
Ye wings of flame,
With you, my spirit flies !

FIRST SHEPHERD.

Ah no, we cannot rise !
But let us hasten on tow'rds Bethlehem ;
There we have yet to see, of all these hosts
The greater King —

REUEL.

But oh, can this be true !
Have we not dreamed ! Say, have we seen indeed
The Seraphim !

FIRST SHEPHERD.

Oh, we have seen, in truth,
The armies of the skies — have gazed unharm'd
On heaven's bright glories —

REUEL.

— Laud and glory be
Forever to the Majesty on High !
But fear'd ye not ?

FIRST SHEPHERD.

I scarce could hear for fright.

ANOTHER.

And for the glorious blaze, *I* scarce could see !

REUEL.

So, let us live, that we may yet behold,
Undazzled, and unfearing, heavenly light —
That we may wear ourselves that silver sheen,
The livery of the skies — and breathe the pure
Empyreal atmosphere, as now the air
We draw, our element and home !

A SHEPHERD.

Oh, bright the hope our holy faith supplies —
And think ! we are not shepherds, half so much
As godlike essences, though clogged with clay,
And here by frailties bound —

ANOTHER.

Ah, wo the hour
When Adam changed such ministers as these
For Eve's decaying beauty, and the charms
That could but yield him offspring like himself,
Earthborn and earthy.

REUEL.

Nay, but hail the hour,
When our Messiah more than pays the fall,
And bids us men, no more in Eden dwell,
But with himself in heaven ! And oh, how glad,
How wonderful the thought ! that we, poor worms,
May yet companions be of angels fair —
Exchanging past'ral pipes for golden lyres ;
These lawns for heavenly hills that ever smile,
These mouldering bodies for enduring youth,
This mortal, for immortal, and this life,

That is but death, for never-ending days
Of beauty and of bloom.

FIRST SHEPHERD.

Ennobling thought !

And ever more my aspirations be
Tow'rds that bright world, of which a denizen,
I soon shall be enrolled !

REUEL.

But we forget !

Come, let us haste to Bethlehem, and see
If all these things are so. The morning breaks,
And ere full day, we have been bid to be
At our Messiah's feet. Burn not your hearts
Within you, when ye think of what to us
A few short hours shall show ?

SHEPHERDS.

They burn indeed !

REUEL.

Aye ; and with holy love, henceforth shall burn,
At mem'ry of the wonders of this night.

For think, we've heard the melody of heaven —
With mortal eyes have gaz'd upon its joys,
Like sainted Enoch, and Elijah too,
That walked with God, and without death, saw life.

FIRST SHEPHERD.

But let us go. And Reuel, tell us all,
As on we fare, about the angel guide,
Last eve that led thee from thy wanderings far.
All night, I saw a something in thy looks
And alter'd actions, making me suspect
E'en then, thou knewest something kept from us.
But tell us all —

REUEL.

I will, as we depart.
Come on with me — and haste ! or else the day
Will be upon us unawares at last.

*Scene changes. A road-side. Enter Zacharias
and Elizabeth.*

ZACHARIAS.

Look, how the morning breaks ! The dark is past ;
Night's stars are fading out, and yonder see

The light that doth eclipse them. There he comes,
The bright, the morning star — himself ere long
To be outshone by beams more beautiful,
Melting in glory — as the righteous die.

ELIZABETH.

He comes, faint emblem of the brighter star
To whose glad rise we go. Oh, happy dawn!
The morning mists shone never merrier!
Earth seems more fair this blest redemption day!
The air is bracing — all's awake and stirring;
Nature doth know her Lord, and thus betimes,
To meet his face, puts gay apparel on!

ZACHARIAS.

A merry morn indeed! And hark, afar
The larum rings of early chaunticleer,
Calling on drowsy man to rouse with him,
And sympathize with nature's gayety!

ELIZABETH.

Methinks these birds of morn all night have sung!
From hill to hill, I've heard them answering —
And, wide awake, the stars and they seem'd vying

Which most should show their consciousness of
joy.

ZACHARIAS.

Now I bethink me, there's a prophecy —
Which long hath been abroad in Israel,
That thus from set of sun, the cock should crow
'Till early dawn, when our Messiah comes,
Winding his shrilly clarion all the night,
And heralding, as wont, the rising day —
His rising day, who on the nations shines,
And warms the people that in darkness dwell.

ELIZABETH.

Oh, I have heard the old prediction oft !
And chance to this we owe our safety now.
'Twas added to the adage, how that then
No plunderer should wait the passenger,
No fiend should lurk to prey on innocence,
No harm should be abroad, no death be blown
Upon the midnight breeze — and that no power
Of demon's art, should work us injury.
So hath it been most happily fulfill'd.
No evil hath been here — the terror, too,
That flies and wastes in darkness, hath been
lay'd —

And quietly upon our way, and affable,
We've travell'd unattended, yet unharm'd.

ZACHARIAS.

Not unattended — for no doubt unseen,
Some guardian-angel hath our footsteps led ;
E'en as of old the godlike poet sung —
Spirits of bliss have charge concerning thee,
From foes to guard thee, and from ills to save.

ELIZABETH.

I erred indeed. No doubt some kindly wing
Of blessed angel, or fair tutelar,
Hath hung our pathway round !

[*Adiel becomes visible.*]

ADIEL.

Yes, blessed pair ;
My pleasure it hath been to guard your way,
And, though unseen, to guide your pious feet —
That early thus, your worship may be paid
Where heaven's high King, and yours, doth dwell
with men.

ELIZABETH.

I startle not -- albeit that from heaven,
Thy bright unsullied sheen proclaims thee dropp'd,
Spirit of Beauty, that thou thus dost come,
E'en like a meteor, on my dazzl'd sight !
Of late, have angels been familiar friends --
We look unwither'd on their flaming wings ;
And scarce with awe, admire their high deport --
So like the days of Eden are our times !
Yet for thy guidance do we yield thee thanks --

ZACHARIAS.

And with our hearts we bless thee, angel-guide,
For safe protection on our darksome way !
Still lead us onward, that mine eyes may see
Th' incarnate image of the Godhead here,
That so, I weary, may depart in peace,
To whom full long it hath been prophesied,
I should not die, 'till I had seen the Lord.

ELIZABETH.

But who are these ?

[*The Shepherds enter. Ruel starts backward on seeing Adiel ; and the Shepherds bow in reverence.*]

REUEL.

[To the angel.]

— Ah, blessed spirit, hail!

That led me safely to my home last eve —

[To Zacharias.]

And peace, most reverend father, with thee be !

ZACHARIAS.

The God of peace preserve thee, oh, my son !

And joy with us ! Messiah hath appear'd !

ADIEL.

[To the Shepherds.]

As well as ye know —

REUEL.

— As our blest ears have heard

From angel vouchers ! Guide us, spirit fair,

To where he dwells ; we seek his holy feet !

ADIEL.

Come then with me. This day is glorious —

And first of men, ye pay the homage due

To Jesu Christ ; which, on this hallow'd morn,

For thousand years his followers shall yield !
This day shall be a festival through time ;
And on its bright return, year after year
Of their redemption, shall the nations crowd
To holy temples, deck'd with verdant wreaths,
— The fir, the box, the pride of Lebanon —
And there, (as ye this blessed morning do) ·
Shall hail the mercy, that has deign'd to stoop
From heaven's high throne, to tabernacle here.

[*They depart.*]

*Scene changes. A long avenue of palm-trees, at
the end of which is seen the manger, with the star
resting above it. The wise men enter.*

OMAR.

Yonder, methinks, must be the lowly roof !

FIRST SAGE.

The angel so described it —

ANOTHER.

— And the star
Hath settled pillar-like, and o'er it burns !

O M A R .

And is the Lord of glory cradled here !
Foxes have lairs, the birds of air have nests,
And more unworthy man hath downy beds,
And hath this God no pillow for his head !
Oh, evermore my heart a temple be,
A dwelling for his praise !

F I R S T S A G E .

—And here, we rest
Till further bidding of our angel friend.
[*Adiel approaches.*]

A N O T H E R .

Yet rest not long, I ween ! For look, here comes
Another god-like shape ; and with him, too,
The shepherds, whom the angel bade us meet !

O M A R .

Aye, and a pair beside of rev'rend mien ;
Belike, the parents of the herald boy,
Whom the bright spirit spoke of—
[*Adiel enters with the Shepherds, etc.*]
— Welcome then,

Blest messenger ! Thou comest not unhopéd !
Oh tell us — is yon humble cot, the home
Of His high glory, whom we haste to greet ?

ADIEL.

It is, blest sages ! Go ye in his gates
With joy and gladness ! So, in future years,
— As often as this holy season comes, —
Shall princes, such as you, their presents bring,
And heap the altars of the God they love,
With richest off'rings, and perfumes divine.

OMAR.

Oh ! here, in precious caskets, have we brought
Odours, the sweetest that Idumé yields —
Incense, that well a seraph's urn might fill —
And gold, the brightest that from Ophir's mines,
Ere sparkled to the sunbeam. Better far,
(As we have been instructed) would we bring
Our soul's pure homage, and the sweet perfume
That, from a lowly heart, we waft to God !
Go, then, forerunner of our happy path,
And lead us, where these tributes we may lay,
At the blest feet of earth's most rightful king.

ADIEL.

Come then, and enter ye his courts with praise !
Thus do I greet you ; for as kings ye come
To cast your crowns before him ; and as born
In Gentile lands, to own his rightful sway
O'er nations, that in darkness long have lain !
So, kings of earth to his bright rising throng —
And all by holy prophet ever writ,
May here be proved !

For thou, most rev'rend priest,
Hast come to view the ending of the law —
The types and shadows all at length fulfilled !
And she, thy spouse, that Salem's daughters now
May meet their well-belov'd, and know, at last,
By him, the serpent's cursed head is bruised —
While, with you still, approach these humble
swains,

To view the tender shepherd of us all —
To learn, that but *his* pastured sheep are we,
Who, with his kindly crook, shall lead his flock,
To pastures ever-blooming, ever fair.

[*Adiel vanishes, as they arrive at the door of the
manger.*]

NOTES.

N O T E S .

NOTE I.

IT has been suggested to me, — I know not with how much sagacity, — that the title, *A Mystery*, itself demands an explanatory note. As the word is, indeed, somewhat technical, I suppose that to many, a few words on its history may not be unacceptable ; and the critic and scholar will of course excuse me, for repeating what must already be so familiar to him, while, in as few words as possible, I remind the less professional reader, of its meaning, and the propriety of its present usance. To those who would more fully examine the subject of *the Mysteries*, and their influence upon the dramatic poetry of the moderns, I beg leave to recommend an interesting treatise of Bishop Percy's on the English drama, to be found in his valuable collection of *old rhyme*, the *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*.

THE MYSTERIES, then, were dramatic representations of different parts of the Scripture History, which were most in vogue during the dark ages, and which were performed chiefly by the monks and ecclesiastics, for the entertainment and instruction of the people. Their name was derived from the fact, that they were generally designed to illustrate and explain the more abstruse articles of our belief, and to indoctrinate the laity with firm faith in the more mysterious parts of our religion. It would seem that the representation of the circumstances attending our Saviour's Advent was a particular favourite, and more frequently and universally presented than any other. The Passion, the Resurrection, and the Slaughter of the Innocents, were themes also in high repute ; and eventually any Bible story was foundation for these shows. They were generally exhibited at the great festivals of the church, and on each occasion the representation was of course appropriate. At first they were mere pantomime ; words, sentences, and protracted dialogue, were of after origin, and came in by degrees. So the Mysteries were improved, and

built upon, until at length they quite died away in the *Moralities*. These *Moralities* were nothing more than dramatic allegories, intended to impress religious truths. The *Pilgrim's Progress*, of Bunyan, is, in many parts, a fair specimen of the successors of the *Mysteries*.

But the *Mysteries* have substantially existed even in our own times; though, of course, not under the old title, nor in their perfected form. In countries which still adhere to the Roman See, there have been exhibitions, even of late years, which much resemble those in which the *Mysteries* took their rise. I have not the book by me for reference, but, if I mistake not, there is in the work entitled "*Buck's Religious Anecdotes*," an account of several such performances, exhibited within this century in some papistical cities of Europe, as appropriate ceremonies for the celebration of Good-Friday and Easter.

These *Mysteries* were thus the origin of the revived drama. From them, profane writers took the hint of the *Histories*; and hence such anomalous dramas as Shakespeare's *Henry Fourth*, and the rest. The *Masques* displaced the *Moralities*, and *Comedy* succeeded the *Masques*. From the *Histories* came the purer form of poetry—the "*gorgeous Tragedy*;" and soon the sock and buskin were treading the stage in all the dignity of their ancient conformation.

In present usage, any Scripture play is properly — *A Mystery*. But for a religious drama strictly conformed to rule, some more specific title would probably be preferred. The *Samson Agonistes* of Milton, which is modelled after the severest master-pieces of the Greeks, is therefore much more appropriately styled a *Tragedy*, — not in the title page indeed, but in the mottoes and the preface.

NOTE II.

It may be proper to state, that in the choice of names, I have had respect to euphony not alone, but also to significance. *Ithiel*, means the *coming* of the Lord; *Adiel*, the *witness* of the Lord: *Reuel*, the *Shepherd* of the Lord. *Serah*, has several very beautiful meanings, and among them are the translations, *lady*,

the song, and the morning star. Omar, was chosen chiefly for its euphony, and because it is early mentioned in Scripture, as the name of one of the dukes of Edom; but it means, not unhappily, he that speaks.

NOTE III.

'Here the knit months seem children of a birth, &c.' Page 15.

That this description of the climate of Palestine is strictly true I am by no means certain; for how frequently do the inspired writers speak of the snow, the hoar-frost, and the hail! Yet the season is without doubt much milder there than in our latitudes, although perhaps not quite so halcyon as here represented. Granting the popular opinion of the genuineness of Christmas-Day, we must infer that the shepherds who first kept Christmas-Eve on the hills of Bethlehem, were either very enthusiastic lovers of their employment, or else had no notion of the sea-coal fire and yule-log, of later days.

NOTE IV.

*'So shall all earth adore him, and e'en now
His gentle reign is in the world begun.'* Page 17.

It is well known that at the time of our Saviour's appearing, the temple of Janus was shut, and an universal amnesty was existing, in accordance with many prophecies of Scripture, and in beautiful illustration of the happy influences of the reign commenced, of the Prince of Peace.

NOTE V.

*'They in turn
Stretch to the dark-browed Ethiop friendly arms,
And hail him offspring of a common sire.'* Page 20.

But times have not been much improved, in this respect, by the Messiah's coming!

NOTE VI.

'*So as the prophet sung, &c.*' Page 20.

The admirer of Holy-writ will readily perceive where I have been indebted to that never failing fount of poesy, throughout the poem. To others, no apology is due for the appropriation. I have therefore not thought it necessary to insert the passages referred to, or quoted, in these notes.

NOTE VII.

'*By the fiery Styx we swear, &c.*' Page 30.

According to heathen mythology, the oath by this infernal river was terrible even to the gods themselves: and as *the fair humanities of old religion*, are the devils of ours, it seems proper to represent these fiends as swearing according to the formula of Pluto and Proserpine.

NOTE VIII.

'*And then perchance*

Loosed for a season, but with weakened might, &c.' Page 34.

It is the belief of some, that several diseases which were common before the advent of Christ, have since entirely ceased. Leprosy, and *demoniacal possessions*, are instanced in proof of this assertion. Perhaps it is true: and at all events, the notion is pretty as a fable. We know that the oracles of the heathen were abandoned by the demons that had aforesaid haunted them, at about this period. Milton has beautifully noticed this fact in his exquisite ode on the Nativity. As to the extinction of these diseases, I am not so sure. Leprosy is, I believe, wholly unknown now-a-days;—I mean of the *physical* kind. But as for *demoniacal possessions*,—I fear they cannot be so easily disproved. To say nothing of some sects of religionists, whose faith and practice evidently contradict the theory—what are we to think of the omniscient subjects of *clairvoyance*? or, what would have been king Saul's opinion of them? *old women* as they are, they

would scarcely have passed for prophets with him ; and unless, like other men of sense, he understood their knavery, they would certainly have been tortured for possessing a familiar spirit. He who so distinguished himself for hunting out witches of old, would surely have been somewhat skeptical as to the mere humanity of such as, though stone-blind, are capable of looking through mountains and millstones, and of seeing to the antipodes, as some, whom no one will take to be wizards, have pretended is done.

NOTE IX.

'A stubborn fate

Decrees it, it must be, &c.' Page 36.

Perhaps it is not improper to assign to the doctrines of fatalism, such a respectable antiquity as this. Demons have ever been consistent fatalists, since they first patched up by its aid, the ignominy of their overthrow ; and whether in their spiritual shapes, as here—or incarnated, as in the French revolution,—their deeds have ever shown that the doctrine is held and honoured, as an heir-loom, by their very extended and influential family.

NOTE X.

'Adiel comes out in the form of a beautiful female.' Page 41.

For Horace has well ordained,

“Nec Deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus
Inciderit.”

And Milton happily gives me this licence, since

———“Spirits when they please

May either sex assume.”

NOTE XI.

'And herald of a Saviour, that shall lead, &c.' Page 41.

Moses was the herald and forerunner of Joshua, as St. John the Baptist was of Christ. *Joshua* was also the name of the

Saviour, which we have in English, *Jesus*, through the Greek and Latin; and Hebrew scholars tell us that this signifies in substance — a Saviour.

NOTE XII.

'His meat the honey shed from Shenir's trees.' Page 45.

The wild honey, upon which the Scriptures tell us, St. John the Baptist subsisted in the wilderness, has been supposed to be of a description elsewhere mentioned in Scripture as deposited upon the leaves of trees, and often dropping to the ground in pure and beautiful globules. This sort of honey is also mentioned by modern travellers. It is more wholesome, and less cloying to the palate, than that of the ordinary kind, so that it might well furnish sustenance to a man. Those who love to read passages that are never old, and who would see a beautiful story of this dropping honey in language as sweet and as uncloying as itself, will not blame me for *reminding* them of the fourteenth chapter of the First Book of Samuel, if they are already acquainted with it; nor for *pointing it out to them* if they have heretofore overlooked it.

NOTE XIII.

'Numberless

As those that seen in Dothan, &c.' Page 53.

See a beautiful account of this, in the sixth chapter of the Second Book of Kings.

NOTE XIV.

'So testifies the Sybil, &c.' Page 63.

The expectation of the birth of some extraordinary personage, at the time of our Saviour's advent, was universal among the nations. Of this, the *Pollio* of Virgil, is sufficient evidence.

NOTE XV.

'Thou knowest it hath been full long foretold, &c.' Page 63.

This prophecy of Balaam was well known to the eastern magi; and it is the opinion of many eminent divines, that these wise men were the descendants of the prophet. The reader may refer to Bishop Newton on this prophecy, and also to Horne's Introduction; in both which this notion is adopted.

I would mention here, that for the greater interest it adds to the story, I have adopted the old notion, that these wise men were princes. This is the tradition; and, of the thousand pictures of the Epiphany which are extant, I have never seen one in which they were not represented either as *crowned*, or as *casting their crowns* at the feet of the infant monarch of them all.

NOTE XVI.

'Oh, may that blessed power our minds illume, &c.' Page 67.

This yearning after divine instruction, as characteristic of the more noble-minded of the heathen, was suggested to me by the well known beautiful answer of Socrates, to the question with which Alcibades foiled the philosophy of that wisest of idolaters.

NOTE XVII

'There doth he rest, a God—the God who rules, &c.' Page 70.

I am well aware that the attributes of deity here enumerated, form but the smallest and least glorious part of the character of the Christian's God. But these are only enumerated by Ithiel, as *introductory* to more full explanations of the chief glory of the Divine Being whom he announces. These are the most prominent attributes of the Almighty, and the least abstract, and are therefore best adapted for the first lesson in theology.

NOTE XVIII.

'I do remember of a lay I've heard, &c.' Page 76.

I have fathered this story of the angels upon an old Rabbin, chiefly because there is some doubt whether the text in Scripture concerning the loves of the "sons of God," should be interpreted as they generally are. The Rabbins however, used to think as our version says; and so does Josephus. They are noble passages for poetry, at all events. Genesis vi. — 1, 2 and 4th verses.

Zuleika is, according to Persian tradition, the name of Potiphar's wife; as see in a note to the Bride of Abydos.

NOTE XIX.

'Peace cometh to men of good-will.' Page 99.

This is the reading of the vulgate, and I believe of all the Romish translations. How they derive it from the Greek I am at a loss to know,—but no doubt the sentiment is true enough, however unauthorized it may be as Scripture.

NOTE XX.

'Now I betink me, there's a prophecy, &c.' Page 112.

The readers of old English poetry, will at once recognise, in this little episode, the prominent features of a very beautiful fable, often alluded to by the older writers, and very sweetly summed up by Shakspeare, in the following passage from Hamlet:—

"Some say, that ever 'gainst the season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
This bird of dawning singeth all night long;
And then they say, no spirit dares stir abroad;
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike;
No fairy takes, no witch hath power to charm,
So hallowed, and so gracious is the time."

NOTE XXI.

'To whom full long it hath been prophesied.' Page 114.

I trust I have taken nothing more than a pardonable liberty, in thus accommodating the story of Simeon, to this equally venerable and privileged personage.

NOTE XXII.

'The God of peace preserve thee, &c.' Page 115.

The excellent Dr. Buchannan tells us, that during his visit to Syria, he met one day in the public streets, an aged priest, or prelate of the eastern church, of very venerable appearance, and habited in his ecclesiastical vestments. The reverend mein of the good old man so impressed him, that he stopped short, and addressed him in Syriac, with, "*Peace be with you.*" The salutation was unexpected; and startled by being so accosted, the holy man looked at him a moment, in surprise. But immediately recovering himself, he stretched out his aged hand as in benediction, and pronounced with emphasis, "*THE GOD OF PEACE preserve thee !*" I have not the book at hand, and therefore tell the story in my own language. But this is, in substance, the anecdote; and I insert it here as the original of the salutations given in the text.

NOTE XXIII.

*'So, in future years,
—As often as this holy season comes, &c.'* Page 118.

On *Twelfth day*, or the festival of *Epiphany*, it has long been the custom of the kings of England to present gold, frankincense and myrrh, at the altar of the chapel royal of St. James', in imitation of the offerings of the wise men. The kings of Spain also perform a similar ceremonial at mass, on that high day.

* * * As this volume has been printed from single proofs, it contains some typographical errors, which will generally be readily perceived and corrected by the judicious reader. In the punctuation, there are some redundancies, and some omissions which have occurred by unavoidable accident. But as these, for the most part, will immediately suggest to the reader the necessary alterations, I deem it unnecessary to supply any further *Errata* than the three following, which are the most important ones :— On the 53d page, there should be no period at the end of the 3d. line ; on the 82d, no comma between the words *too* and *like* in the fifth line ; and on the 88th page, the fourth line should read thus : *Nay, the stars leave us.* The reader can correct the former two of these, by a slight use of his penknife in crasing the superfluous points.

639





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